The central focus of my instruction in English 101 is the development of the skill of articulating a strong thesis and its supportive defense.

As the student gains proficiency in critical thinking and careful articulation, a growing sense of purpose and audience also shapes his or her rhetoric and a growing confidence in embracing tension develops. An emerging sense of confidence in one’s voice often leads the writer to re-examine his or her own prejudices, presumptions, expectations, and claims. For many, this is new and threatening territory; few have been encouraged to do this well in the past. To facilitate this, I select readings, shape discussions, and assign writing around the theme of diversity and multiculturalism. As part of a service learning assignment, I ask my students to work with Homework House as tutors at Hall Elementary School; then I ask them to reflect on what this experience might teach them.

The world at the corner of Hall and Grandville seems far removed from the world at the corner of Burton and the East Beltline. Time after time, conversations with my students reveal that they were simply unaware that this culture, this educational reality existed. One student shared with me that, although he grew up in Grand Rapids, he had never been in any neighborhood west of Division Avenue. Another was struck by the fact that Hall Elementary’s geography books were 25 years old. Another student was overcome with emotion as he told me of a tutoring session during which a young girl asked about his new watch and how he had acquired it. When he told her that it was a Christmas gift from his mom and dad, she exclaimed, “You have a dad?” It is through these experiences and stepping outside of the boundaries of Calvin’s Campus, that students confront, perhaps for the first time, a sense of “the other.”
As the Community Partnership Coordinator for Rooks Van Dellen, I, along with volunteers from my dorm, help care for the kids at Baxter’s Daycare Center weekly. Over the past two years, I have learned so much from this experience. I see the rewards of my commitment to one agency when I am able to call the kids by name and have a level of familiarity with the teachers and staff. For the past two years some of the girls from the program visited Calvin for Siblings Weekend. Six girls stayed with us for the weekend and we sang at karaoke and made tie-dyed t-shirts together. This was a wonderful memory because I made a video of the weekend and brought it to Baxter the next week to show the girls. They were so excited that we watched it four times!

The biggest challenge starting off for me was the difference in culture. Most of the students are African-American and since I was not raised in that culture, I felt like a foreigner and often an intruder. However, this encounter is actually the greatest source of growth. After learning more about racial inequality, race relations, and education, I feel better prepared to deal with my situation at Baxter. I feel like I have a better understanding now that I have built relationships with the students and teachers. Often, it seems that I learn more than I am able to give to the Daycare, but I guess that is why this experience is called Service Learning.

"Often, it seems that I learn more than I am able to give to the Daycare, but I guess that is why this experience is called Service Learning.”
~Rachel Meyer

**ABSL NEWS**

In July 1992 a group of Calvin faculty issued a report describing the current thinking and practice of integrating service with academic study, and ever since then academic based service learning has been in practice at Calvin College. Academic based service learning is defined as “service activities that are related to and integrated with the conceptual content of a college course, and which serve as a pedagogical resource to meet the academic goals of the course as well as to meet community or individual needs”. Today, close to 60 classes campus wide use service learning in their classes. Some professors have students tutor at local schools while others send students to local food pantries, women’s shelters, retirement homes and much more. Often times professors require it for classes while others create a voluntary option, but over all students have very positive experiences and learn much more outside the classroom.

**Building Relationships**

Rachel Meyer, Rooks-Vandellean CPC

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Volunteer of the Year

This past fall Calvin Senior, Dan Bethel, received the volunteer award at Heartland Hospice. He began volunteering in February of 2003 and every Thursday for almost a year Dan, along with his partner Ashley Loan, drove to Greenville to visit their assigned client, Bob. During their hour together each week, they spent much of it chatting, playing cards, or taking Bob around town. Unfortunately, Bob passed away in late October but Dan will never forget the wonderful benefits he learned in working with Bob.

Through this experience Dan learned about the amazing impact another person can have in one’s life. Dan stated, “You realize that this person (in my case Bob) was deeply dependent on those weekly visits because we were his friends, whom he loved.”

“About 95% of the students report a positive experience and are sure they will donate blood again.”
~Hessel Bouma

Giving the Gift of Life
Hessel Bouma III, Professor of Biology

Many studies show that the college years are years when people gain life-long habits. Blood banks routinely report that only 5-7% of the general population ever donate blood, though nearly 90% of the population will need blood products at some point in their life.

In my sections of Human Biology 115, I offer a modicum of extra credit (EC) to students who successfully donate a unit of blood—a kind of service-learning project. We spend time studying blood, the cardiovascular system, health, and sexually transmitted diseases. Students who donate a unit of blood learn better how these are involved in the blood donation and transfusion processes.

Through the EC, I am hoping to develop a good habit of donating regularly. It’s encouraging a form of stewardship and civic engagement, sharing the gift of life through blood to others. Encouraging blood donation should not be coercive; therefore, I give students an alternative of writing a short paper on some facet of the blood donation process, encouraging them to consider why they cannot give blood.

The EC is for successfully donating, and answering questions about the blood donation process: Why the finger stick? For what reasons might you be rejected as a blood donor? Will you donate again?

Why or why not? About 95% of the students report a positive experience and are sure they will donate blood again.

"Together we can save a life"
In *The Call of Service*, Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist who teaches at Harvard University, draws on his life experience to connect the stories that he has heard about people's service and their learning in the process.

He explains the diversity of service, people's motivations, and hazards that people can encounter as they do service. In the introduction of the book, Coles explains his motivation for his work. He says, “I have wondered what to make of what I have seen and heard, and what to make of those of us who put ourselves in situations where we straddle our ‘regular’ world and a world we ‘visit’” (Coles, xvi). His book’s purpose is to show that it is not the places or tasks that connect service; it is the people who are involved and their ability to reflect on the service and how it shaped them. At the conclusion of his book, he mentions the theme of the stories he has heard. He says, “How should I be living my life? That is the question I keep hearing my students put to themselves.” (Coles, 272). Service can help us understand how to live our lives and to recognize the ideals that we are aiming at. It is a good read and the stories show the impact that service has on people and the communities that surround them.